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ABSTRACT

This manual is intended to be a how-to guide for school district leaders who want to begin using a school-based approach to improve the quality of education in their districts. The manual provides a brief review of the school-based improvement process--what it is and the rationale for using it. One section deals with implementing school-based improvement ideas. This guide will help to identify the people who are key to instituting school-based improvement: district superintendents, boards of education, district staff, parents, community members, teachers, and principals. A variety of strategies used to gain support are provided: districtwide, pilot, school selection, and selecting and training facilitators and councils. Another section points out the steps needed to move into and institutionalize a school-based improvement approach. Guidance on avoiding common pitfalls is offered. Appended are (1) key presentation points and transparency designs for an orientation to school-based improvement; (2) a model memorandum of agreement; (3) examples of needs assessment instruments; and (4) 17 references. (SI)

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SCHOOL BASED

A MANUAL FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

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Barbara J. Hansen AND Carl L. Marburger

SCHOOL BASED IMPROVEMENT

A Manual for District Leaders

By

Barbara J. Hansen

and

Carl L. Marburger

The National Committee for Citizens in Education
Suite 301, 10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia Maryland 21044

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FOREWORD

This is the first of a series of manuals on school based improvement to be published by the National Committee for Citizens in Education. This document, *A Manual for District Leaders*, follows the publication of NCCE's *One School at a Time: School Based Management, A Process for Change*. Other manuals will be directed at the training of school improvement councils and district facilitators, and how to involve parents and citizens in the process.

Although we have expressed our gratitude to the foundations that supported this project, we would like to say a special thank you to Pat Edwards of the Mott Foundation and Colin Greer of the New World Foundation for their support.

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The task before us is the restructuring of our entire public education system. I don't mean tinkering. I don't mean piecemeal changes or even well-intentioned reforms. I mean the total restructuring of our schools.

The system is not just failing a large number of students—those who drop out or fail to make satisfactory academic progress; it is failing dedicated teachers [as well].

It is failing them because schools are organized to meet the challenges of the 19th—not the 21st—century. And until those challenges are updated in line with reality, the system will continue to fail.

Lockstep, myopic management is still the norm in American education today, just as it was in American business while the Japanese were relentlessly taking over market share in industry after industry.

American business fell behind, not just because the Japanese were better, but because we were committed to ossified management structures. It wasn't just that our plant and equipment needed replacing. Our entire way of thinking needed to be replaced. Not just updated or revamped—replaced.

That's why today's successful companies bear little resemblance to the companies of 10 or 20 years ago. Today's high-tech firm is lean: It has stripped away middle management. It is decentralized, relying on the know-how and professionalism of workers close to the problem. It is innovative in the deployment of personnel, no longer relying on limited job classification. It spends heavily on employee education and training. It invests heavily in research.

Successful firms have discarded the archaic, outmoded, and thoroughly discredited practices that are still in place in most of our large school districts. Those districts are organized like a factory of the late 19th century: top-down, command-control management, a system designed to stifle creativity and independent judgment....

We've found that productivity relates directly to the degree of freedom and independence we afford our employees. And that's precisely how schools must begin to think if they expect to attract and hold the best and the brightest.

To educators, I say this: If you believe the building principal is the most important person in the education chain of cause and effect, as I do, then do what other professions do: Lawyers hire administrators to run their law firms *for* them, and pay them less than the partners earn. Doctors do the same thing. Educators should do no less.

Make central administration a service center. Go ahead and allocate funds, but the principal and staff will be responsible for spending them. Central administration should *sell* its services to the buildings—let teachers and principals decide how much overhead they want. That will streamline middle management, I assure you, and it will put resources where they belong, in the school building.

Hiring and firing should be done at the building level, as well. When principals and teachers participate in the selection process in their own schools, you can be certain of one thing: Quality and performance will improve.

David T. Kearns
Chairman, Xerox Corp.

Excerpted from "A Business Perspective on American Schooling." *Education Week*, April 20, 1988.

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

Purpose of Manual

The National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) believes, as its name implies, that parents and citizens can and should play a more active role in the governance of their schools. It is this belief that has prompted our long support for school based management. Happily, what was once only a handful of people interested in improving schools one by one has grown to numbers of organizations and school districts beyond the capabilities of the NCCE to directly assist. Conceived as a way to share our knowledge, this manual is intended to be a how-to guide for school district leaders who want to begin using a school-based approach to improve the quality of education in their districts.

> Our approach has two prerequisites: 1) that the reader believes lasting educational improvement requires a major restructuring of the enterprise, not another program added to what is already there; and 2) that the reader can, in some way, influence the power structure within the district to permit this restructuring to occur.

Contents

In this manual you will find a brief review of the school-based improvement process — what it is and the rationale for using it. If you would like to know more, we recommend *One School at a Time: School Based Management, A Process for Change* written by Carl L. Marburger and published by NCCE as a companion to this manual. The material presented here is designed to help you implement the ideas introduced in that book. This guide will help you identify the people who will be key to instituting school based improvement, and it will provide you with strategies you can use to gain their support. It will also point out the steps you need to take to move into and institutionalize a school based improvement approach. And it offers guidance on how to avoid some common pitfalls. Other guides in this series can be used in training school councils, district facilitators (people who provide ongoing assistance to school councils), and parents.

History of School Based Managment

NCCE began its school based management efforts in 1978 when it convened the first national conference on the topic in Denver, Colorado. This meeting, supported by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, brought together practitioners, scholars, interested national education organizations and parent representatives to share their ideas and experiences. During the conference, Laurence Pierce from the University of Oregon presented a research paper, and superintendents and other practitioners described what they were calling school based management. Following the conference, NCCE conducted training sessions for six schools from across the country. At

that time, however, only a few districts, notably Salt Lake City and Monroe County, Florida, had successfully instituted school based management, and very few educators were interested in restructuring school governance. The few state departments of education that had encouraged or mandated school based management approaches (California and Florida, for instance) usually found the implementation of the vision falling far short of the ideal, while others were unable to even get the idea off the ground because of the opposition it engendered.

NCCE's Efforts and Approach

Using a small grant from a Rockefeller family member, NCCE applied itself to finding out how school based management could best be implemented. From a pilot program with five schools in New Jersey we discovered something very important: changing the decision making structure of a school or district isn't enough to create sustained, focused school improvement. For that to happen, local school decision-making groups, usually called school councils, need to learn how to get and use information—data on their own schools as well as findings from high quality studies in education. Now, instead of emphasizing school based *management*, NCCE works with districts in instituting school based *improvement*, with democratic decision making as a major element in the process.

NCCE's approach to school based improvement (SBI) is unique in that it calls for:

- creating and training district SBI facilitators to work with local school councils,
- involving those with the greatest stake in school improvement — parents,
- providing extensive and ongoing training of council members,
- clarifying decision making roles through negotiating memoranda of agreement, and
- providing councils with a tested and sound agenda for improvement by linking their efforts to the research on effective schools.

WHAT IS SCHOOL BASED IMPROVEMENT?

Administrative Decentralization

Many larger school districts have created intermediate regional or district offices as a way to become more responsive to their various communities. New York City is the classic example. This is referred to as *administrative decentralization*. This may be a necessary administrative move in systems with special racial or ethnic problems, in districts under court orders to provide special groupings or special services for certain schools, or where the district is too large to be manageable from a single central office. Unfortunately, administrative decentralization can also be a mechanism for blocking communications with individual schools and for dispersing bureaucratic accountability for those schools.

Political Decentralization

Political decentralization is a sharing of authority and power with local schools without a layer of intermediate units to block the flow of information or decisions. This form of decentralization is the cornerstone of school based improvement. It is difficult for many to understand that sharing power does not ultimately diminish power. That is as true for superintendents and school board members as it is for anyone else. But sharing authority and power is absolutely essential if school based improvement is to occur. Superintendents and school boards must be willing to specify, with great clarity, the decisions they are willing to delegate.

Shared Decision Making

Another essential ingredient of SBI is shared decision making. This means that the authority shared with the school must also be shared by the principal with staff, parents, community, and students. Principals do not give up authority or power easily either. They fear loss of control and retribution from the central office if they do not perform up to some real or perceived standard of efficiency. Unless they are willing, however, to share their authority with their constituents, the locus of power will have been simply transferred from the central office to the principal creating a new bureaucracy at the school level.

A Process, Not a Project

School based improvement requires both political decentralization and shared decision making, but it can take a number of different forms. That is because SBI is a process, not a project. Once launched, it evolves until it becomes the way the district and its schools manage and improve themselves. But, while the specifics may differ from school to school and district to district, all have three common elements:

- a management philosophy,
- an educational strategy, and
- an organizational structure.

Management Philosophy

School based improvement is founded on the following beliefs:

Beliefs

- People can be trusted. Those interested in and responsible for the education of children hold the welfare of those children in high regard.

- People are more likely to change when they have a voice in what those changes will be.

- Those who are closest to where implementation will occur are in the best position to decide how implementation should take place.

- Without bureaucratic interference, decisions are made more swiftly at the local level, and involving those affected brings more rapid and complete implementation of solutions.

- It is easier to change people's behavior than to alter their beliefs. If the structure of an organization is changed so that risk-taking and innovation are encouraged, people will behave accordingly.

- When people work together on common concerns, they lose the sense of being in separate camps.

- The resources for change and improvement are already in the school community. All we must do is release the energy that is now constrained.

- Parents are important contributors to the educational success of their children.

- Involving students in decision making gives them an opportunity to become responsible members of a democratic society.

These beliefs are buttressed by research that shows:

Research Findings

- The more control a school has over those aspects of its organization that affect its performance– the articulation of its goals, the selection and management of its personnel, the specification of its policies– the more likely the school is to exhibit the qualities that have been found to promote effectiveness;

- Teachers who feel they are influential in decisions are more innovative and more likely to share their ideas with other teachers;

- Students who view their parents as supporting the school have higher self esteem and more positive attitudes toward school;

- Parent involvement in their children's schools is directly related to student achievement;

- Parent satisfaction with schools is positively related to parent participation and influence in decision making.

Sources: Chubb, 1987; Henderson, 1987; Hansen, 1983.

Teacher Participation

Recent calls for reforming the public schools are stressing the importance of allowing teachers to act like true professionals by giving them greater decision making authority in return for accountability for student progress. This is a dramatic change from earlier reports which called for higher standards and recruiting better teachers. This new focus on the working conditions of teachers stems, at least in part, from the attention being paid to employee participation by American business. Concerned about declining productivity, business leaders have turned to the employee participation programs of Japan and Western Europe as ways to more effectively use their employees' talents. Quality circles are one form of worker participation now widely used in American industry. They provide a mechanism for employees to be involved with decisions about their work. While the industrial model cannot be applied directly to schooling, the principle is the same. The persons closest to the activities are in the very best position to have reliable opinions and judgments about those activities and should be the ones to decide the best way to perform those activities.

Union Response

Some teacher organizations have embraced the call for greater professionalism and are urging local boards of education and central office administrators to institute new procedures that provide for greater involvement of teachers in decisions that affect their lives and those of their students. Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio, for instance, have instituted peer appraisal programs and the Dade County, Florida and Hammond, Indiana teachers' unions have negotiated a number of collaborative efforts, including successful pilot programs of school based management.

Benefits

There is mounting evidence that the school based improvement philosophy of involving teachers can have the following benefits:

- higher morale;
- more positive feelings about school leaders;
- increased commitment to the school and lower levels of absenteeism and turnover;
- improved management decisions;
- greater acceptance of change;
- enhanced cooperation and reduced conflict; and
- more effective enforcement of discipline.

(as reported in Corcoran, Hansen & Shidlowski, 1988)

Superintendents and boards of education members care about the education of all of the students in their districts. Otherwise, they would not and should not be in those positions of trust. It is at the local school, however, where the greatest knowledge exists. Staffs and parents know intimately the special nature of the children in their school, their capabilities, and the best ways to educate them. They know the uniqueness of their community, the problems and the joys of each family, and how best to reach those families. The local school, then, is the logical place for decisions to be made about how to educate each student.

All parties to the enterprise are strengthened by the SBI process. When we empower others, we become empowered. When superintendents trust principals and staffs to make more significant decisions about what happens at their school, the superintendent has not lost power or authority but has gained the strength of a united and trusting faculty. When teachers trust the principal to act in the best interest of both the students and themselves, that principal, by empowering them, has now become stronger than he or she could ever be as the sole decision maker in that school.

Educational Strategy

"Effective" Schools

The focus of school based improvement is on improving the educational quality of schools for all the students in them. It is not like categorical programs that are aimed only at targeted student populations. It looks to create effective schools – schools that make a difference for all the students in them.

SBI is based, in part, on evidence known as the effective school research. These studies, done by Ronald Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, Larry Lezotte, and others on schools where all students are learning are especially important because they disprove the myth that schools can't overcome the effects of disadvantaged environments. No longer can schools excuse their poor performance on the premise that students cannot be expected to learn.

Out of these studies has grown a standard that says schools are effective only when all students, even those from severely disadvantaged families, are achieving at levels considered acceptable for middle class children. Schools that meet this standard tend to have the following characteristics:

- strong instructional leadership;
- high expectations for both staff and student performance;
- primary emphasis on teaching the basic skills;
- clear instructional mission;
- parents and community involved in the schools;
- a positive climate for teaching and learning; and
- program effectiveness measured by frequent monitoring of student progress.

Research Limitations

This research has some limitations, however. Most of it was conducted in elementary schools, for instance, so the applicability of the findings to high schools is uncertain. Nearly all of it was conducted in urban areas, which can be very different environments than those of more affluent, suburban settings. Effectiveness was defined as achievement in basic skills– a limited focus some would say. And many of the studies did not address equity and resource issues. In fact, one reason the findings are popular with politicians is the implication that effective schools can be created without additional resources.

Other interpretations of the data are also problematic. Sometimes complex interrelationships have been ignored in an oversimplification of the findings, and assumptions made about cause and effect that the data do not warrant. The effective schools research is useful in diagnosing what may be happening in schools, but its findings cannot necessarily be directly translated into solutions.

"Good" Schools

All that having been said, the research on effective schools, combined with research on effective teaching and research on working conditions in the private sector, *does* provide a useful framework for improving schools. By adding these other bodies of knowledge, the definition of effective is broadened to what Purkey and Smith (1983) call the "good" school. According to them, a good school has 13 characteristics broken into two categories—organizational and structural variables, and process variables. Signs of sound organization and structure are:

Organization and Structure

- freedom and flexibility to tailor programs to meet the needs of the school's students—school site management;
- active leadership in setting a school vision, implementing programs and policies, modeling school norms, supporting and motivating staff and evaluating progress;
- staff stability;
- curricula that are articulated between grade levels and integrated within grade levels;
- school-wide staff development that includes ongoing coaching and is closely related to the school's instructional program and the needs of the school as identified by the staff, not tailored to the needs of individual staff;
- parent and community involvement;
- school-wide recognition of academic achievement;
- maximized use of learning time both within and outside of school—no interruptions, no pull-outs, assignment of appropriate homework; and
- district support.

Process

The processes that lead to the creation and maintenance of good schools are:

- collaborative planning and collegial relationships—staff sharing ideas and information, and making decisions together;
- a sense of community—being recognized as a member of a distinct, supportive group;
- clear goals and high, but realistic expectations that focus energy; and
- order and discipline with agreed upon rules that are enforced fairly and consistently so all are treated equitably.

Learning is the product of two work forces—students and teachers. The school based improvement process emphasizes creating environments where working conditions for both support student achievement.

Organizational Structure

Common Features

Districts and schools vary in how they implement the SBI process, but they also share some common features. They all have school site councils where decision making is shared; they have negotiated agreements with their boards of education about which decisions the councils are authorized to make; they all operate within the dictates of law, regulations, and local board policy (although special exceptions can be granted); and they have some autonomy in budgeting and spending funds. SBI does not mean every school in a district doing its own thing. The district must continue to play an important role through such things as:

District Role

- establishing attendance zones and otherwise determining the composition of the student body;
- defining the criteria for student success or failure with promotion standards, attendance requirements, and local graduation requirements;
- setting the tone for the district and shaping the expectations and work norms of the staff;
- collective bargaining and contract enforcement;
- establishing the length of the school day;

- providing research data to the schools;
- raising and allocating revenue;
- planning for enrollment;
- reporting to state and federal authorities;
- providing district-wide programs, including special education;
- providing the political support needed for schools to make their own decisions (and mistakes); and
- monitoring quality control to ensure that schools are meeting district goals

(Buttram, Corcoran, and Hansen, 1985, and Kirst, 1988).

School Role

From their side, the schools can:

- establish goals based on school-wide assessments of needs;
- develop or choose curricula;
- determine instructional methods;
- provide training for parents;
- work in consort with other district schools to align curricula;
- allocate school funds based on goals and needs;
- determine numbers of staff and positions needed, and
- hire staff.

Perhaps the best way to describe school based improvement is to present it in action, so here is a brief look at a three schools that are using an SBI approach:

Example

Jefferson Middle School

At Jefferson Middle School, which is in an urban district, many school decisions that were previously made by the principal or central office are now being made by a 15-member school site council. Serving on the council are teachers, parents, students, support staff, and community business people. The principal is a member of the council, but he never chairs it. A smaller group that includes the principal sets the agenda for the council's meetings. When the council tackles a major project, such as the review of a particular curriculum, it often works through subcommittees made up of council members and other interested persons.

Each member of the council is expected to regularly talk to six of his or her colleagues or peers about the issues being considered by the council and to bring their input back to the council. Those six, in turn, are expected to talk with six others. Through this "pyramiding," the entire school community has a say in the decisions of the council.

A central office staff member serves as the council's facilitator during its meetings, which are held during school hours and for which staff receive released time. Her role includes providing the group with

information, and she is expected to bring appropriate research findings to the attention of the council. Recently, for instance, she went through the school's state test results with the council after disaggregating the data by race, sex, and socio-economic background. Another of her responsibilities is to help the council arrive at decisions, preferably by consensus. When the council was first formed, she worked closely with its chairman (one of the parent members) to help him develop his meeting leader skills. Now that the group has grown more comfortable with its decision making process, this help is less needed. The district facilitators received intensive training in group process skills before the school based improvement pilot began.

Jefferson is part of a pilot program in the use of school based improvement that has been underway for over two years. During that time, the council has received four days of training in the SBI process and the leadership skills necessary to make it work. In addition, council chairs and principals from the district's SBI schools have been attending an ongoing series of workshops

One of the first activities the council engaged in was a needs assessment of the school. Discipline was identified as Jefferson's biggest problem. The council, working with groups of teachers, students, and parents, drew up a new discipline policy and student code of conduct. The policy was implemented this year, and the council is now planning a study of how it is being enforced throughout the school.

Each of the district's SBI schools prepares its own budget, which is submitted to the board of education. Monies are allocated to the schools on a per pupil basis on a district-wide formula. Although the SBI schools do not receive any more money than other schools, they have greater flexibility in determining how it is spent. Jefferson's school site council could, for instance, decide to hire two teaching assistants instead of a teacher, as long as the school's pupil-teacher ratio does not exceed district standards.

Example

Highview Elementary

Highview Elementary School, which is in a suburban area, operates a little differently, yet it is also using an SBI process. It is one of two schools that have been using an SBI approach for five years. Its school site council is made up of the principal, a board of education representative, three teachers, and three parents. It meets once or twice a month after school, occasionally for dinner at a member's home. An open chair is kept at each meeting for others to join them for presentations or debate. Each year the district pays for a one day retreat where the council receives training in group dynamics and decision making that builds on the intensive training they underwent when SBI was first instituted. Since council members serve staggered terms, these retreats are good occasions for reviews of the council's

decision making process. After five years of practicing leadership, those skills are now second nature to the group.

The council works with a district SBI task force made up of board members, administrators, teachers, and community members on district-wide issues and projects, such as when the board of education asked for advice in developing district policy regarding the role of site councils, but most of the time its focus is on the school. Over the years, the council has created a school handbook, instituted changes in the school's lunch program, made recommendations for improvements in the math curriculum, altered the school's discipline policies and procedures, and improved traffic safety around the school.

Example

North Middle School

At North Middle School, a large concrete building in an inner city, the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade student population is 67 percent Black, 12 percent Hispanic, and 21 percent "other." There, the principal works with a group that calls itself the "faculty board." This group meets one or two times a month to make all major decisions about how the school will be run and the budget spent. Recommendations are developed in subcommittees, which meet more frequently. The changes they have made center on school organization and teacher review, such as assigning peer teachers to observe other teachers and extending the school work day. Both required waivers from board regulations and the union contract, which were received.

Students at North are divided into teams of about 150-200, which are subdivided into heterogeneous smaller groups that stay together throughout the school day. Teachers are assigned to the teams, so that all their students are from the same group. The faculty board felt it was important for each team to have a faculty "team leader" to coordinate overall team activities and to facilitate meetings of team teachers where student progress is discussed. The board asked for extra pay, plus release from some instructional duties, for team leaders, and a rearrangement of the school day permitting students to leave 15 minutes earlier and giving teachers 40 minutes of team planning time.

The board of education and the union granted North's faculty board's requests under a four-year pilot program being conducted in 32 of the district's schools. This experiment, based on the theory that troubled schools will respond better to more autonomy than to more control, has given schools unprecedented authority to determine how to spend their funds, deploy staff, and design the instructional program. There are two conditions:

• The school must form a governing body, or cadre, composed of teachers, the principal, and other staff or community members, that decide together how each school will be run; and

• Any changes that require waivers of board policy or the union contract must have as their primary aim measurable benefits for students.

North's principal believes their school based improvement process has resulted in a tremendous improvement in communication and morale. "Now, when a decision needs to be made, we all make it together. I have a group to back me up. More necks are on the line than just mine."

HOPPING HURDLES

Wary Teachers and Parents

When you set out to establish the school based improvement process in your school or district, you are, in effect, creating what Roland Barth, Senior Lecturer on Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, calls a community of leaders. And, he says, don't expect immediate acceptance. Teachers may be wary about being tricked or angry that it has taken so long to recognize the importance of their input, and principals are likely to fear losing what little authority they feel they have. Even harder to overcome, according to Barth is "the culture of schools [that] extracts cruel and unusual penalties for teachers who violate the taboo against wanting to distinguish themselves...in the eyes of their peers" (Barth, 1988). Parents may also be reluctant to get involved with the schools. Perhaps they have felt shut out in the past and don't believe an invitation to participate could be genuine, or they don't feel they have anything valuable to contribute to school decisions. Which is to say, don't expect instituting school based improvement to be easy or that it will happen overnight.

Evaluations of school based improvement efforts have shown that success comes only when people see themselves as gaining power through the process rather than losing it. Some of the barriers to success that were encountered were:

- statutes and regulations that restricted the ability of site councils to make appropriate decisions;
- union contracts that restricted the time teachers could spend on activities outside their classrooms, including training;
- lack of school control over their budgets;
- insufficient administrative and leadership support;
- little teacher involvement in and commitment to the process;
- few models on which to pattern school efforts;
- a "project" mentality that separated the process from standard operating procedures instead of supplanting them; and
- too little time allowed for the process to succeed. Some research suggests that it takes three to five years for meaningful change to take place. (Campbell, 1985 and Hill, 1987). Others contend that seven years are needed before a reform really works as expected (Tyler, 1987).

The best way to hop these hurdles is to try to avoid creating them in the first place. And the best way to do that is to build support for the SBI process with those who will be involved with it.

The District Superintendent

Rules for Superintendents

The district's superintendent of schools will make or break any school based improvement process. Other individuals will play important roles in the success of the effort, and there may be some who will have a negative effect on it, but no one is more key to the process than the superintendent. An actively supportive chief school administrator will not guarantee success, but without one, the process cannot even get started. To institute and sustain SBI, the superintendent must:

- be willing to relinquish some authority in order to gain the power that comes from success;
- convey to the board of education a feeling of trust and confidence in SBI;
- convey to staff and parents the expectation that they can lead;
- provide the necessary resources;
- be willing to train leaders and give up the idea that it is easier/better/quicker to the job himself;
- select and/or develop principals who are secure in their own capabilities or who have the potential to learn;
- encourage diversity among schools;
- put the spotlight of success on the schools, knowing there are plenty of opportunities for the superintendent and board to shine;
- resist the temptation to step in when the going gets rough;
- share the responsibility for failure and learn from it;
- monitor progress carefully so everyone knows the effort is important to the district and that schools will be held fully accountable for their efforts; but
- be careful not to overburden schools with reporting paper work.

The Board of Education

Memorandum of Agreement

Even the most enthusiastic superintendent won't be able to establish a school based improvement process without the support of the district's board of education. The board must be willing to negotiate a contract with each school site council that spells out the authority of the council and defines its relationship to the board. The contract,

usually called a memorandum of agreement, should be as clear as possible about the areas where councils have autonomy to make decisions and where they can only make recommendations to the board and/or central administration. The agreement will also state the areas and conditions under which the board will be willing to alter the district's practices to allow for improvement to take place in the schools. This agreement is an important step to assure the board that their authority will not be eroded through SBI, and that issues peculiar to each school will be addressed in the most effective manner by drawing on leadership at all levels of the system.

Realistic Expectations

The expectations of the board need to be realistic. School based improvement is not a money-saving measure. Indeed, to do it right will cost additional dollars—not many, perhaps, but some. Some studies report that small discretionary funds and mini-grants are important motivators for schools. Also, released time and funding for initial and ongoing training of councils will be needed as well as assistance to councils by central office personnel. If only some of the district's schools are engaged in the SBI effort, the board must be willing to deal with questions about equity from non-SBI school administrators and parents. Board members must also recognize that SBI is a long-term process for change and that increases in student test scores are not an appropriate short-term evaluation measure, while encouraging, even expecting, school councils to have improvement in student achievement as their overriding goal.

District Staff

Why Important

Central Office staff are important contributors to the SBI process. Most of the facilitators will come from their ranks, and the quality of assistance they provide to school councils will greatly influence the councils' effectiveness. They can also, if they choose, be blocks to the success of the process because they often hold the key to resources desired by the schools. Unfortunately, they are likely to be the group most resistant to decentralizing decision making (Pierce, 1978).

New Roles

When SBI works well it is because central office staff have learned a new way of delivering services to school. Many of the traditional functions of the central office—negotiating collective bargaining agreements, maintaining a staff applicant pool, purchasing, district-wide maintenance, food services, data processing, printing, transportation, curriculum expertise—continue under SBI. What may change is how schools access those functions as the emphasis shifts from controlling what goes on in the schools to assisting schools in solving their problems. It is this change in focus, and its attendant ambiguity, that creates anxiety. Once central office staff see that their jobs are not diminished, their fears will lessen.

Parents and Community Members

Value of Involvement

School based improvement can take place without the involvement of parents, but it has a much greater chance of succeeding when parents are active participants in the process. Ronald Edmonds described, in a letter, the value of parent participation this way:

> Since I regard instructional effectiveness as a minimum prerequisite to institutional excellence, there does come a point at which parent participation becomes an essential element in school life. I believe that the evidence supports me in arguing that schools are responsible for pupil acquisition of minimum competency in basic school skills regardless of the level of parent participation in the life of the school. I also believe that without parent participation, schools cannot move to that excellence that is our ultimate objective in so vital a matter as public education.

Which Parents to Involve

Problems can arise when parents are either over-involved or under-involved. At one end of the continuum are parents who are ready to take over the running of the schools, given the slightest chance (these are the parents teachers most fear); at the other end are parents who won't come into the schools even when their children are in serious trouble (these are the parents teachers most complain about). Most parents are somewhere in between. They support what the schools are trying to achieve, but have not been given opportunities to demonstrate it, except in working with their own children. These are the parents you want to bring into the SBI process.

Existing Groups

The best way to build support for school based improvement among parents is to work through existing groups – the PTA, PTSA, PTO or other parent organizations. Be sure to involve groups such as Chapter I committees and parents who have banded together to support their handicapped or gifted children. Try to reach out to as wide a constituency as possible and present the concept of school based improvement to parents and citizens throughout the community. Assure them that SBI is not every school "doing its own thing," and that the board and central office will be carefully monitoring the results. Explain the function of school councils and point out that they will supplement and not supplant existing organizations. Ask for their help in getting information about SBI into the community.

Incentive

Gaining parent involvement may not be easy. Traditionally, schools have tried to bring parents in by inviting them to take part in activities the school has determined – to participate in the school's agenda. By inviting parents and community members to help set the agenda, there will be a greater incentive for involvement. And consulting with parents in advance about changes affecting their children vastly increases the likelihood of community support for those decisions.

The Teachers

Responses to Expect

Some teachers will enthusiastically embrace school based improvement. They will recognize that the process empowers them in ways never before available to them. Others will be afraid or distrust the administration's motives for instituting it. Still others will reject it because they don't want to be bothered by making decisions beyond their classrooms' walls. After all,they may reason, you can't please everyone all the time, so let the principal take the heat for unpopular decisions that have to be made.

Teacher Organizations

If the district's management/labor relations are cordial, the most effective way to gain teacher support for SBI may be through the teacher organization. In some districts, in fact, the impetus toward SBI is coming from the unions as a strategy for enhancing teacher professionalism. There is a growing number of instances where negotiated contracts contain clauses that promote SBI principles. New York City, Rochester, NY, Hammond, IN and Dade County, FL are recent examples. Where contract language allows contract provisions to be waived, within certain guidelines, when the teachers at a school feel it is necessary to do so, those schools are freed to develop solutions to their unique problems. At the very least, if SBI is to have any chance of succeeding, the teacher organization must agree to not sabotage the effort.

Approach

Where more strained relationships exist, the key to obtaining teacher support will be an open, flexible approach. No one should be forced to participate in SBI activities. At the same time, the door to involvement should always be wide open and beckoning. The enthusiastic teachers will start the movement, and others will follow.

The Principals

Concerns

As with the superintendent, a positive principal can make SBI flourish while a negative principal can cause its demise. Since principals often feel they have the most to lose with SBI, gaining their support may be difficult, but it is also imperative. Principals in Milwaukee raised the following concerns about that district's plans to institute school based management. Some of them address nuts and bolts issues of implementation; others illustrate the fears that principals may have about changing the decision making process.

- We are moving too fast, we need more time for planning.
- The staff is feeling left out.
- We need an expert to come in and show us how it has been done elsewhere.
- Principals need inservice help; too much is being expected of us.
- Inservice must be ongoing and must be replicated periodically due to the turnover of staff each year.
- The principal is ultimately responsible but the team is to have the power. We are the ones whose heads will roll, yet we don't make the decisions.
- The problem is we already have too much help that's not even helping. What we need is freedom to do the things we know need to be done.
- Parents and community can turn this process into a political platform.

These kinds of concerns are not unique to Milwaukee. Some version of them is likely to be raised in any district contemplating SBI.

Questions

The Milwaukee principals also asked some pertinent questions:

- Who will be held responsible for team decisions?
- How will principals be evaluated?
- Can my school drop the process after it has begun?
- What will this program give me that I don't already have?
- How much flexibility will principals have?
- What is the outcome expected that will be worth the extra effort?
- What are the measures of success?

- Will the money allocated to the schools who are piloting the process affect the non-pilot schools?
- Who will serve on the council? Will council member positions be open to the public?
- Is there any provision for extra help or overtime being considered?

(Milwaukee Public Schools, 1987)

Approach

Principals in many districts have become enthusiastic supporters of SBI, but most of them had some reservations at first. Their concerns need to be addressed directly and with as much clarity as is possible, given the nature of SBI as an evolving process. And, as with teachers, SBI should be presented to principals as an invitation, not an edict.

Orientation

One way to start building the support needed to institute SBI is to hold a series of orientation sessions for principals, teacher leaders, central office staff, board of education members, and parent/community leaders. The SBI concepts and theory should be the focus of those sessions, and plenty of time should be set aside for discussion and questions. It is very important that people come away from these sessions with answers to their questions or at least an understanding of the planning process that will be used to address those questions. (A model presentation, including suggestions for overhead transparencies, is included in Appendix A.) The next step would be to invite those who are interested to help design the district's implementation plans.

GETTING STARTED

Should SBI be District-wide or Piloted?

Starting the Process

School based improvement should be a part of the total school system's management process, and all schools should eventually be included. Most systems begin with pilot schools while some smaller school districts involve all their schools from the beginning. Specific examples are:

St. Louis Public Schools	12 schools out of 116
Allentown, PA	4 schools out of 20
South Brunswick, NJ	1 school out of 7
East Baton Rouge Parish	12 schools out of 102
Pine Hill, NJ	2 schools out of 2
Dade County, FL	33 schools out of 260

Adding Schools

We recommend districts begin with pilot schools and then phase in the remaining schools. In St. Louis, for example, a second twelve schools were introduced to the process the second year, and the remaining schools were brought in the third year. Allentown intends to bring in an additional four schools each year until all schools are included. One advantage of initiating the process with a few schools is that special consideration can be given to them as they "work the kinks out" of new procedures.

Examples

There are a number of different models that might be considered in establishing pilot programs. The St. Louis system, for instance, picked three schools from each of the four regions of the city– one high school, a junior high that sends its students to that high school, and an elementary school that feeds into the junior high. Allentown, PA didn't want to begin with high schools because of perceived difficulty in getting parent involvement, so they chose two elementary and two middle schools for their pilot program. In New York City only elementary schools are involved because the city's high schools are administered separately. E. Baton Rouge Parish, LA decided to include elementary, middle and high schools in the regions represented by its 12 board members. And Boston followed a high school/feeder schools pattern, mainly because the initial impetus for a school based approach came from high school headmasters.

Criteria for Selecting Schools

If the decision is to begin with pilot schools then expand to others, the next question is which ones. SBI has been successfully instituted in elementary, middle and high schools, so school organization does not pose insurmountable problems. Each district must consider its unique situation. In East Baton Rouge, court orders, desegregation issues, and complicated bus schedules were serious considerations. Schools in St. Louis were selected as a result of an SBI orientation workshop for all principals in the district. Principals were then asked to volunteer if they wanted their schools to be part of the process. In Allentown, PA, the superintendent selected schools headed by principals who were enthusiastic about SBI.

Importance of the Principal

The character of the student body has no bearing on the degree of improvement obtained through the school based improvement process. But school level leadership does. The leadership may be coming from the principal, but it could just as likely be emanating from a strong faculty, or the school's teachers' union, or even from an activist parent group. But if the principal is not a strong leader, he or she must be at least willing to examine the notion of shared decision making and to share some authority and decisions with staff and community. Principals who are incompetent, or totally resistant to the idea, or so rigid that shared decision making could not be a part of the process should not be included, at least in the initial phase. It is also helpful to have an established parent group and a faculty that is used to having some voice in the operations of the school and is not threatened by change.

Screening

The kind of screening process you use will be determined by the size of your district and your reasons for instituting SBI. If yours is a small district, you may decide to let schools volunteer to be part of the pilot program after you have held orientations to the SBI process. If so, it is important that both the principal and a majority of the teachers agree to volunteer. Teachers are the central agents of school improvement. Without their support, the effort cannot succeed.

RFP

If the district is larger, a request for proposals (RFP) procedure might be used. This is the process that was used in Dade County, FL. There, all of the schools in the district were invited to respond to an RFP prepared by the central office. Schools were invited to indicate the school improvement efforts they wished to undertake and the possible blocks to the success of those activities. The blocks could be district and school board prohibitions or policies, the union contract, or state law or regulation. The district and the union then approved 34 of the proposals and provided over 100 waivers of district policies and contract provisions to those schools.

Choosing the RFP approach will make the selection process longer, perhaps by as much as a year. But it will also speed up the ultimate implementation of SBI because the schools will have had time to assess their needs and to think about their goals. Again, it is important that a majority, even two thirds, of the teachers support the school's participation in SBI. You may want to consider allowing teachers who are unhappy with the prospect of taking part to transfer to a non-pilot school.

Choosing Schools

There are situations where working only with schools that volunteer is not possible. If the district is under desegregation orders, for instance, or where it is important that racial balance be maintained, or in cases where the district wants to include high schools and their elementary and middle feeder schools, it is appropriate for the superintendent and central office staff to make the decision as to which schools to involve. A word of advice in these instances—don't select your "best" principals—the trusted few that get asked to do everything; they're probably too busy to put in the energy required. Don't select your worst either; school based improvement isn't a salvage operation for poor principals. And watch out for principals who say they can't leave their buildings because they are too needed there; they are likely to be making all the decisions and unwilling to give up any authority. Look instead for the principals who have a passion for the idea of school based improvement. They may not know how to use the SBI process, but as Barth suggests, innovative solutions often come from those who don't know how, but want to learn (Barth, 1988).

Building Trust

Equally important, assure principals that school based improvement will not be used as a mechanism to evaluate them. If SBI is perceived as a threat, people will do whatever is necessary to sabotage it. Let principals know that you believe it is unfair to hold individuals accountable for decisions they are expected to share and that you know the benefits of SBI are long-term and can't always be seen or measured in yearly time spans. SBI is a trust process. Teachers must learn to trust administrators and parents. Principals cannot be fearful of retribution from "downtown" if they make a mistake, and they must trust their staffs to always act in the best interests of all children.

The opposite of trust is fear. If teachers fear parents, or vice versa, and staff are afraid of the principal, then communication and creativity and shared decision making in the best interest of students are not possible. If they learn to trust each other, then many things can happen. SBI is the process that enables all the actors to learn how to work together in trust and caring.

Selecting and Training Facilitators

Why Needed

New school site councils usually have difficulty in two areas: They often have problems identifying important tasks and sticking to them, and they get bogged down in their ability to work as a team. Left to their own resources, they often flounder and become discouraged. If skilled staff from the district can be made available to the councils whenever they meet, especially during the first year, council meetings are less tense and more productive.

Their Role

Facilitators help councils plan and carry out their goals and objectives. They are not members of the teams but consultants to them—providing advice, bringing resources to bear, and guiding council members through the decision making process. Facilitators have no agenda of their own, but are well-versed in the theory and practice of school based improvement and are capable of guiding the council in the direction it seeks to go. They are also knowledgeable about group dynamics and skilled in helping people work together in teams.

Where Found

Every school site council could benefit from having a facilitator attend its meetings and be on call to answer its questions, but where does a district find such people? The best place we have found (provided the district is large enough) is the central office. Not all central office staff have the skills to be facilitators, but with training, many can assume that support role. And there is also no reason why teachers can't be freed-up to work with schools other than their own. In Toledo and Cincinnati, teachers spend a year or two as peer evaluators and then go back to their classrooms. The same approach could be used for SBI facilitators. Whatever the source, however, the number of internal facilitators trained should be larger than the number of school councils planned, so some facilitators can be used for back-up.

Criteria for Selection

Facilitators need the following qualifications:

- A thorough and up-to-date knowledge about SBI;
- A commitment to carry out its intent;
- An ability to design short, experiential training experiences, such as role-plays, for councils;
- A willingness to see themselves as part of the SBI team;
- An ability to differentiate being a member of a council from being its consultant;
- An ability to perform in a leadership capacity that has credibility with the council without taking authority from the council leadership; and
- An awareness of the difference between being "liked" and being "valued."

Training Needed

Many districts do not have people with these requisite skills for the simple reason that they have never needed them before. Most staff are hired because of their expertise in some area, and they are trained to teach others. Consequently, when working with groups, they tend to make themselves the focal points of discussion rather than the facilitators of discussion by others. For that reason, most people selected to be facilitators need training in how to succeed in that role. That training should include an in depth exposure to group dynamics and process facilitation. Topics covered should include:

- the concepts and theory of school based improvement;
- the research on effective schools, teaching, and organizations;
- the role of the facilitator;
- group dynamics and process observing;
- models of decision making;
- models of planning;
- how various personality types affect group behavior.

The best training will provide many opportunities for facilitators to try out these skills and get feedback on how well they have used them. Video taping facilitators at work in mock council meetings is a valuable technique.

To give some idea of how intensive this training needs to be, the NCCE initial facilitator training program lasts three to five days. We prefer to conduct this training in early September, before school starts and before the school councils begin their training. We then follow up with monthly, one day sessions throughout the year. The follow-up sessions provide opportunities for facilitators to share their successes as well as their problems and to further hone their skills.

What They Do

Facilitators are expected to attend all the council meetings of their schools. In the early stages of the SBI process, this may be as much as two or three times a month. These meetings may take place before school, during school hours and/or in the evening. They must also be on call to their councils when their help is needed. For instance, one facilitator was asked by his council to help expedite the printing of a survey the school wanted to send to its parents. What normally would have taken four weeks, given the usual complications of a bureaucracy, was accomplished in one because of her efforts. This kind of acting as a go-between within the central office is probably more important in large school systems than in small ones, but it can be a critical function when a voice for the SBI school is needed in the central office.

Facilitators are also responsible for training council members when outside consultants are not hired by the district. Even when consultants are brought in, the facilitators should take part in the

council training. That is why it is important for facilitators to be selected and trained before councils are formed.

Problems

It should be clear that the facilitator role is an important one. Too often, however, it is just an added responsibility. People are assigned to the job, but not relieved of any of their other responsibilities. This causes severe time problems for facilitators and limits their effectiveness. Building trust is also an issue. Central office staff are traditionally seen as supervisors or agents of the superintendent, not helpers. Trying to maintain both roles may be impossible. That is one reason why SBI works best when it is clearly seen as a management process, not a project.

Since most school districts use supervisory personnel as facilitators, SBI has many implications for their traditional role. Rather than being perceived in an evaluative role, they now can be seen as helpers. In fact, many supervisors were originally called helping teachers.

This often means that supervisors can continue to bring subject matter expertise to the school system and can continue to provide special training for staff in that specialization. Under SBI, however, a growing percentage of their time needs to be devoted to direct assistance to school councils, usually not in their subject specialty, but in group process and group dynamics. This calls for careful preparation and candor in soliciting the help of supervisory personnel.

Establishing School Site Councils

Size of Councils

The basic decision making unit at the school is a group of participants who are called councils, teams, units, or committees. The number of members can vary depending on the size of the school and/or the school organization– elementary or secondary. If a council's membership is below seven, it often is not representative of an entire school or community. At the same time, when council membership is over 15 or 17, the decision making process can be unwieldy. If representation from high school departments or houses is important, or if grade level representation is important in middle or elementary schools, the determination about size should be whatever the school feels is necessary to represent the school's major consitutencies.

Role

Councils are a representative form of governance, and those selected must perceive their role as just that. Any decisions made by the council must be taken back to the various constituencies for consultation or approval.

Who Should Serve

The membership of a school site council should reflect the broadest cross-section of those with a stake in that school. At a minimum, the council should consist of the principal, teachers, and parents– preferably parents who are representatives of existing groups within

the school community. Where they are old enough, students should also serve. It is often a good idea to include a member of the school's support staff– a secretary or custodian. They bring a perspective that can be very useful. Some councils have had success with including a board member and/or a representative of the central office administration, but this is not generally recommended. The following are strongly recommended for membership on the councils:

Teachers

Teachers: Initially, it may be wise to ask teachers to volunteer for service on the council. That way you are more likely to get those who are ready to accept the responsibility with some pleasure. If there are existing faculty groups within the school, they should have a role in choosing members of the council. We recommend that the school's union representative be a member of the teacher contingent, but this can vary with the relationship with the union. Eventually, some mechanism for selecting representatives will need to be developed. Most schools that have used SBI for any time have evolved teacher elections of some sort. But no matter how teachers get onto the council, the entire faculty should be made aware of the existence of the council, its purpose, and how its representatives were selected.

Students

Students: Students are generally the least consulted of all the public school constituencies. Yet they bring special knowledge and skill to that which they are experiencing. Most school councils at the middle/junior high school and high school levels do involve students on their councils. An occasional elementary school will even involve students. Students are selected from existing student councils or on the recommendation of staff or as volunteers. We strongly recommend from the experiences of many councils that students be a part of the process.

Support Staff

Support staff: Custodians, secretaries, aides, and crossing guards are often the window of the school into the community because they are often the persons most likely to have first contact with parents and other community members. They also have special knowledge about the school community and the informal decision making processes which exist. Some councils also include professional support staff– visiting teachers, school psychologists, and attendance officers– as representatives on their councils. Representation from all types of support staff is highly recommended.

Parents/Citizens

Parents/citizens: The evidence is clear that when parents are involved in their children's education, children go to better schools and children do better in school. Parents also bring great wisdom to the deliberations of a council if they are truly a part of the decision making process. They know intimately about their own children and their community and have access to other parents who also bring knowledge and understanding to the process.

Citizens also have unique contributions to make. Senior citizens, parents of non-public school children, local shopkeepers, social service agency and business people who are a part of the community

can all assist the process. And their participation helps provide the school and school district with much needed support on budget and bond issue votes and more favorable publicity for the schools in the media.

Parity

The Salt Lake City Public Schools, in their form of SBI called Shared Governance, developed a "principle of parity" for their councils. This means that the parent/citizen/community component of the council must have at least as many members as the professional component. The state of California also specifies that there is to be one more parent/community member than professionals serving on its councils. We subscribe to the parity concept, for the professionals can often overwhelm less articulate or more timid parents.

We also recommend that there be a method to rotate members off the council and to add new members regularly. If the council membership remains the same for too long, members tend to be perceived as elitist, and sometimes the level of creativity and innovation drops. Many districts have found that a rotating two or three year term maintains continuity of membership while adding new blood to the team.

Methods of Selection

Finding parents willing and able to commit the time required for consistent attendance at council meetings can be a major challenge. If there are active parent groups, their leadership should be consulted. They will undoubtedly have questions about the role of the council vis a vis that of the parent group and may well want their own representatives on the council. Charles Ivory and James Mundy, who were instrumental in initiating school based improvement in the Pine Hill, NJ schools, suggest you use classroom teachers to identify parent organization members, room mothers, and others who have been supportive of the schools. They also believe your most difficult task will be to overcome those parents' feelings of inferiority and intimidation by the system. Effective training in group dynamics and a conscious effort to solicit and accept their contributions will do the trick, they say. You may want to schedule extra training just for parents as New York City has done.

Over time, councils will adopt methods of selection that work best in their communities. Most will either elect parent members from an existing parent group, PTA, PTO, PTSA, etc., or have them appointed by either the faculty or the principal. Some schools use a combination of appointment and election to guarantee representation for all ethnic and racial groups in the school attendance area.

Principal

Principal: The principal is the key individual in any school community. Her/his participation on the team is essential. Some districts have made the principal a non-voting member of the council, but we strongly recommend that the principal serve as an intimate and voting member.

As a member of the SBI team, the principal is in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, he/she is accountable to the superintendent

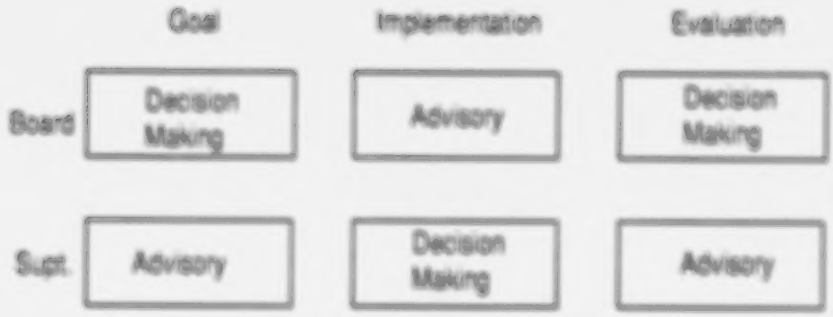
and board for what happens in the school, academically and in terms of discipline, behavior, and morale. Yet, on the other, the principal has but a single vote in the decisions made by the council. This conflict can be resolved by proper use of the position's tremendous influence. A principal has the power of position, of title, and of access to information and often is the most articulate member of the group. So, the principal can greatly influence the decisions of the council without having to overtly dominate it. While principals are concerned about losing power and needing to override inappropriate decisions, no principal in our experience has ever had to veto a council's decision. In a trust process, decisions that would necessitate a principal veto simply are not made. Indeed, the data overwhelmingly indicate that the greatest obstacle to effective council operation and true shared decision making is the refusal of the principal to relinquish decision making authority.

Role and Power

Shared decision making is a difficult process. Those who have authority, real or perceived, are often reluctant to share that power, feeling that those without authority want to take it for themselves. Larry Zenke, the superintendent of schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, presents a perspective on shared decision making that is helpful in understanding the interplay between advisory and governance roles under SBI:

Decision Maker vs. Advisor

> A board of education is a statutory body, empowered by law to set the policies for a school district. It is assisted in this process by the superintendent and staff. When determinations are made about the goals of education for the district, the board of education is the decision making body and the superintendent is its advisor.
>
> After the board of education has established a program as policy, the superintendent becomes responsible for its implementation and the primary decision maker. The board is an advisor to the superintendent.
>
> When it is time to evaluate the program, the roles are again reversed . The board is responsible to its constituents for finding out whether the program worked and, if so, how well. They will make the decisions about its continuation, modification, or cancellation. The superintendent is an advisor to that process.



When board and superintendent roles become confused or mixed, school systems can experience great trauma. When superintendents coerce boards into adopting certain policies, or when the board merely rubber stamps what the superintendent wishes, the board has abrogated its responsibility. It is just as damaging to board-staff relationships when a board tries to administer the school system and make decisions about how programs are to be implemented.

The roles and functions of local school councils and principals are analogous to those of the board and the superintendent. The council has the responsibility for setting the goals for the school, advising the staff on implementation of any programs which flow from the goal, and for evaluating the results of the effort. The principal and staff are advisory to the council in the goal setting and evaluation processes, but are the decision makers on the implementation of the program. The principal and staff are the experts on how to institute, for example, a homework policy or a new science program.

Ambiguous Roles

Like many analogies, however, this one is not completely applicable. The reason is that the school's principal and the teacher representatives on the council are ambiguously both decision makers and advisors. As they sit on the council, they are helping establish the goals and objectives for the council's operation, and are also advisors to the process and reporters to the total faculty. Most teachers and principals learn how to accommodate to these shifting roles without dominating either process.

Training Councils

Training Needed

All the reports on school based improvement efforts emphasize the need for effective training in group dynamics and education in the acquisition and application of research data. In addition, council members, especially parent representatives, need to know how the school and the district operate. Schools have traditionally fostered individual achievements, not teamwork. Teachers haven't been taught how to work together in groups, let alone how to work with parents as colleagues. SBI demands a collective responsibility for decisions, which means that councils have to have the skills and knowledge necessary to make good decisions. Initial training for site councils should focus on the following needs:

- Members need to be well grounded in the theory of school based improvement and to have material and reports about SBI efforts in other school systems.
- They need to know about the research on effective schools, effective teaching and successful strategies for educational improvement and how SBI can enable them to work toward making theirs an effective school.
- They need to know something about how the school system operates. Who is responsible for which operation of the system? How does the budget process work? How do repairs get made? How are personnel selected? What are the roles and functions of specialist supervisors? This is the ideal place for central office personnel to make presentations to the school councils.
- Councils need to know how to work together as a team. How to make decisions—through voting and consensus. How to plan together, and set goals and objectives. How to deal with non-participants in the group or those who monopolize the conversation. Councils need not only group dynamics theory, but also practice in dealing with the kinds of problems groups often encounter.
- Councils need to know which data are important to have about their schools, how to gather it, and how to interpret it.

Time Required

It is more cost effective to bring three or four school councils together for joint training. It is even more effective if the training takes place at a retreat setting away from the district. The cost of facilities and substitutes for teacher members, and the difficulty for parents to be away overnight might preclude that possibility. Regardless, it is important that a minimum of three days be set aside for initial training.

Subsequent training sessions should focus on the needs of individual councils and the issues with which they are struggling. Most likely, council members will want additional training in problem solving and decision making, and how to obtain additional resources to support their activities.

Decision Making Guidelines

How to Kill Decision Making

Two unfortunate things can happen when we delegate authority to make decisions. One is to have a group spend considerable time making a decision– doing their homework, gathering their data, and formulating a presentation– and then have that decision rejected out-of-hand by the administration or board. After a few such rejections, the group will either disband or work only on "safe" decisions, like when to have the cake sale. The second thing that can happen is for the group to make a decision which is then shelved, never to be acted on or even responded to.

To avoid these situations, establish clear guidelines or parameters at the beginning of the SBI process. The broader and less specific and restrictive the guidelines, the more flexibility and freedom are possible.

The following guidelines are adapted from those used by the Salt Lake City Board of Education:

Legal

• **Are the decisions legal?** No council can violate the law. Federal, state, and municipal law is all codified and usually readily available, so it should be clear to all members of the council what they must abide by. For example: most states have laws regarding the length of time that must be devoted to physical education or the history of the state. Much as a council might wish to change one of these, it is not possible without a change in the law. Further, the federal laws on handicapped and disadvantaged children have explicit provisions that must be obeyed. To avoid frustration or possible illegalities, it is important that councils know these limits.

Within Policy

• **Are the decisions in line with board policy?** Every board of education has policy related to all manner of management and curricular matters. They, too, are usually codified and should be readily available to the principal and/or the council members. Experience demonstrates that as high as 90 percent of the decisions made by councils around the country are easily within board policy. A board, for example, usually has a discipline policy. The local school council might well wish to expand on that policy to make it more appropriate to their unique discipline problems. If there is significant variation from the board policy, then the council, through the principal or

council chair, should be able to negotiate those variations with the board.

Waivers

The Dade County (Miami) Public Schools allow their pilot school based management schools to apply for waivers of board policy and teachers' union contract provisions if the councils can make a convincing case that the waiver will remove a barrier to improving student achievement. Seventy-five percent of the school staff and the principal must approve the application. Establishing that kind of process gives schools and councils a sense of the strong commitment being made to SBI by the board and the union. As exceptions to policy and contract provisions are approved, that commitment is reinforced, and a high trust level is established.

Within Budget

• **Are decisions within the budget?** Each council can take the responsibility for determining how the budget that is allocated to the school is spent. In most school systems, much of the money that is made available to the local school is already allocated for specific purposes, leaving little flexibility. The remaining dollars usually represent the supplies, materials, and books allocations that have historically been the province of the principal. Some school systems, however, are moving toward school site budgeting, where money is made available to the school for decisions about such things as minor repairs, substitutes, staff development, or aides. One district began its planning for SBI by creating lists of possible areas for the transfer of budget authority to the local school (see Negotiating a Memoranda of Agreement).

If a district does move toward greater decentralization of the budget, it is essential to have some training in accounting, budgeting, and bookkeeping for the principal and some school staff.

As more budget-making authority becomes available to the local school, a role for the council in determining its allocation is essential. With money comes authority and responsibility, and the council becomes a more prestigious and important entity in the school.

Ethical

• **Are the decisions ethical?** Each district must insist that no council can make any decision that would be harmful or damaging to any child or group of children, teacher or group of teachers, parent or group of parents, or any member of the administration. All decisions must be ethical as defined by that district.

Within Contract

• **Are decisions within the contract?** Most school districts also include the teacher's contract as a parameter for the decision making by councils. While provisions might be made for granting waivers, the contract as a whole must be honored. An interesting special provision has been added to the teacher contract in New York City. The *Board of Education Special Circular No. 44, School Based Options,* states,"...regulations concerning class size, rotation of assignment/classes, teacher schedules and/or rotation of coverages...can be

modified...through negotiations and agreement between the principal and the union chapter...and the proposal must be approved by 75% of the UFT [United Federation of Teachers] represented staff who vote." The Dade County waiver procedure requires that any requests must be justified in terms of improving student achievement. Final approval in both New York City and Dade County rests with a special committee of top union and district officials.

Board Restrictions

In addition to these guidelines, school boards may want to add specific restrictions to council decision making. For example, if a special program in mathematics or reading has just been initiated district-wide, a board may wish to tell local schools councils that that program is off limits until an evaluation has been made.

Principal Restrictions

Principals may also eliminate some areas of their responsibility from council deliberation. Such personnel decisions as evaluation of staff are often retained as the principal's prerogatives. If a principal sets a large number of conditions, however, the council's authority will be severely limited and its ability to function greatly damaged.

It is most important for the principal to make her/his conditions known from the very beginning of council activity. Those conditions need to be "up front" and clear before the council begins work. Councils do not object to restrictions when this happens and if the list is not too onerous.

Organizing Councils

Mission Statement

The first task of a newly established council is to create a mission statement for the school. If a district has a mission statement, the local school might model theirs after that, but usually each school has special and unique needs and conditions that should be separately addressed. A mission statement is a "dream" statement, much like "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We have not achieved that ideal in our society, but we can aspire to it. So it is with a school. The focus of the mission statement should be on students. Its purpose is to define for the school community what the school stands for, the values it upholds, the beliefs that sustain it, and the desired outcomes for students.

Importance

A mission statement is important because it provides a beacon by which directions are set and decisions examined. If it is not part of our mission, should we be doing it? But in addition to its intrinsic value, the process of creating it benefits a new school council. A mission statement reflects the values of its writers and by expressing their values and beliefs, members grow to know one another. They may wrangle over words, but they will learn how to compromise in order to

arrive at a resolution. Also, by engaging in an early task that has a clear beginning and an end, a council experiences the pleasure of success—an important ingredient in building group morale.

Needs Assessment

The second step in organizing councils is for each to develop and conduct a needs assessment. This means soliciting from the faculty and the community their opinions of whether the school is doing well and where they think there are gaps that need filling. It also means collecting statistical data about the school, such as test scores, absentee and dropout rates, and disaggregating them so that comparisons can be made. For instance, are children from low income families consistently scoring lower than children from wealthier families? Are girls scoring lower in math than boys? Are minority students disproportionately involved in disciplinary actions? Yes answers to questions like these point toward areas that may need attention.

Instrument

There are a number of instruments that can be used to assess opinions about the school. Some examples are in Appendix C.

Once areas of strength and weakness are identified, the next step for the councils is to set goals of short, medium and long range duration. What do they want to accomplish over the next year, the next three years and the next five years? Goals are targets; they are important because they define what to shoot for. They are not cast in concrete. As circumstances change, so should the goals.

Goals

Following are some goals that have been established by SBI councils around the country. Note that some of them can be classified as "management initiatives"—goals that can be accomplished within a specific time span, do not deal with curriculum and instruction, and are generally within the control of the local school:

Management Initiatives

- student discipline—suspensions, absenteeism, tardiness, or expulsions;
- safety and security of building and grounds, and school neighborhood;
- report cards and general reporting to parents;
- lunchroom food and discipline;
- maintenance of the building; and
- development of school and parent handbooks.

In a sense, these are cosmetic changes; they do not alter the structure of the educational process. Ones that do are "educational improvement initiatives"—goals that go to the heart of the school's mission: student learning. These goals are generally longer term and more difficult to achieve. They include such items as:

- grading procedures;
- curriculum improvements;
- staff development;
- staff morale;
- special program implementation, such as computer labs or gifted and talented;
- use of staff, aides, and volunteers; and
- selection of staff and school administrators.

Educational Improvement Initiatives

Almost any issue can be within the council's province, as long as the decisions conform to the guidelines that have been established.

The natural tendency of councils is to work first on management issues because they are more readily solvable in a defined time period and because they are less threatening to staff who feel that instructional initiatives are their prerogative and are threatened by the presence of parents. After a period of time, as greater trust builds, councils should begin to take on the more complex instructional improvement goals.

Making Substantive Decisions

Some councils, however, never do get at issues of substance and keep "repainting the lunchroom." One of the most important functions of the principal and key staff is the role of instructional leader. It is up to these council members to keep the whole team on tasks that have payoff for the improvement of instruction.

Goal Examples

- To develop liaison procedures between the school and surrounding community organizations.
- To construct a parking lot for staff/visitor parking.
- To improve the basic and expressive speaking skills of our students in grades K-8.
- To increase student supervision at recesses and while entering school.
- To increase the number of students moving from the bottom to the upper quartiles in reading and math by 5% over the previous school year.
- To improve the appearance of the school.

Identifying Problems

An important part of the goal setting process is a potential problem analysis. What obstacles will the council have to overcome to achieve its goals? Will district rules and regulations get in the way? Will contract provisions hamper their efforts? How will the council overcome these obstacles?

Priorities, Plans and Parties

The final step in organizing is for councils to establish their priorities and plan the initial activities they will undertake. Councils need to focus on a reasonable number of important activities and then organize their schools to take action. It is important that the entire school family be involved in the SBI process, not just the school council. Setting up subcommittees to work on specific projects is an effective way to achieve greater involvement. It is also important to see tangible results within a reasonable period of time, so that everyone feels the pleasure of a successful experience. Councils and committees should be encouraged to sprinkle opportunities to have fun within their activities, breakfast or dinner meetings perhaps, or other occasions to socialize. This is an important part of team building that is often ignored, especially in large, urban districts.

Negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement

A memorandum of agreement between the school site council and the board of education is an essential ingredient to the success of school based improvement. When several schools in a district are undertaking SBI, there may be one agreement that covers areas common to all of them plus individual agreements covering specific situations.

The contents and format of individual memoranda of agreement vary widely, but usually all contain:

Contents

- a statement of philosophy– the district's belief in the concept of SBI and shared decision making;
- the duration of the agreement;
- the purpose of the agreement;
- specific obligations of each of the parties; and
- the circumstances under which the agreement can be ended or renegotiated and the procedures for doing so.

Decisions Allowed

It is important to clearly state the kinds of decisions that schools will be allowed to make, not only for the protection of the central office and board of education, but because, without that authority, many councils will not even consider making important decisions. For instance, on the next pages are the areas for decision making that serve as a guide to the Dade County schools and a proposal developed by another district for handling resource decisions.

Handling Resource Allocations Under School Based Improvement

Resource	Controlling Authority	Maximum School Based Authority
Professional and support staff	Board determines allocation formulas based on enrollment. Instructional chain of command may provide additional positions beyond formula for programmatic reasons.	Provide the school with the dollar equivalent of the positions and allow them to determine the mix of staff and non-staff resources as long as they provide the educational program and achieve the specified educational results.
Instructional materials and supplies	Board determines a per pupil allocation upon the recommendation of the superintendent.	Is used as the school sees fit.
Textbooks	The Division of Curriculum Managment adopts texts which are purchased and distributed to schools according to the number of students taking the course.	Allow schools to purchase whatever texts they choose within guidelines and resources provided.
Instructional support services (subject area specialists)	The Division of Curriculum Management supervises the the staff and determines the degree of service available to each school.	Provide schools an allocation for this purpose and allow them to purchase days of service at specified unit costs.
Maintenance	The Division of Physical Plant allocates positions to schools generally in proportion to square footage.	Provide allocations to schools and, within district procurement and personnel practices, allow them to hire or contract for maintenance.
Heat, power and light	Paid for by Physical Plant budget.	Provide allocation based upon history, adjust for degree days, and allow schools to use savings for their purposes.
Food services program	Controlled by Business Management Division within federal and state guidelines.	Have food services personnel report to and be evaluated by the principal.

The Dade County School district provided the following list of possible areas for school level decision making for consideration by its SBI pilot schools:

- Staff development activities
- Provision of support services
- Student discipline
- Security measures and procedures
- Maintenance and renovation needs
- Curriculum objectives and content
- Flexibility in instructional methodologies
- Expenditure of funds
- Issues of staff morale
- Peer review/evaluation
- Selection and retention of staff
- Selection of materials, equipment, and supplies including textbook and library materials
- Flexibility in classloads, grouping, and scheduling of students
- Utilization of staff including paraprofessionals and other support personnel
- Implementation of special programs, e.g. Chapter 1, dropout prevention programs, etc.
- Procedures governing field trips, athletic programs, student performances, and other outside events
- Teaching assignments, schedules, and room assignments
- Any issues, matters, and/or recommendations to improve the school and its instructional program
- Student grading guidelines and procedures for notifying parents of student progress
- Required reports and other forms of paperwork including lesson plans, charts, gradebooks, etc.
- Involvement of parents
- Involvement of business

Clear yet Flexible

One of the challenges of SBI is that there are no standard methods for implementing it. Each district and school creates it own approach. That means that nothing can be absolutely fixed. What a council or a board of education thinks will work today may need to be changed in light of tomorrow's developments. Therefore, memoranda of agreement should be both clear and flexible. A council needs to know the limits of its authority, yet at the same time, it needs a mechanism for reinterpreting those limits under changing circumstances and for

resolving disagreements about them.

Procedure for Preparing

The usual procedure for drafting a memorandum of agreement is for the person in the central office who had overall responsibility for SBI (the superintendent or his/her designee) and the school councils to jointly develop an agreement that clarifies the commitments and expectations of all the parties. The central office staff member drafts a statement of the district's school based improvement philosophy and the district's commitment to the process. Included are the timelines for the pilot program and the mechanisms for phasing in additional schools, the variances from district policy that the board and central office are willing to consider, and the incentives the district is offering to schools that are willing to participate in the SBI process. Also included are the district's expectations of the schools, e.g. that they will form councils, that they will submit reports, that they will follow certain procedures.

Meanwhile, the individual school site councils are developing their goals and plans, which will form their part of the agreement. Included are the management and instructional initiatives they plan to undertake and the time lines by which they expect to achieve them. Also included are their recommendations for overcoming the obstacles identified in their potential problem analyses, especially those items that are controlled by the board and central office.

Through a series of meetings between the central office staff and the council chairpersons, an agreement is reached. It is then ratified by the councils and the board of education. The document's signators, at a minimum, should be the board of education president, the district's chief school administrator, the school site council chairs, and the school principals. Samples of memoranda of agreement developed by school districts around the country can be found in Appendix B.

Maintaining Momentum

Problems in Leading a Revolution

There will be times when it will feel like nothing is happening and times when you wish what is happening, wasn't. As with every new effort, mistakes will be made; some people will get upset, others will be resistive. Problems will crop up that may have nothing to do with school based improvement, but they will require attention and energy that could be devoted to working with the schools.

It is important at these times to not lose sight of what you are trying to accomplish. Instituting SBI is a significant undertaking. At its best, it is a complete refocusing of school governance— a revolution of sorts. And you are leading it.

Actions

Here are some things you can do to help maintain momentum:

- Keep an ear and an eye out for the small as well as the large achievements in schools and publicize them.
- Find ways to bring together the principals who are enthusiastic about SBI so they can share ideas.
- Continue the training for councils and take part in it yourself. This will demonstrate your support, and their enthusiasm will give you a boost.
- Make sure your channels of communication stay open so you can nip problems in the bud.
- If you are too busy to pay close attention to the SBI process in your schools, make sure you have given the assignment to someone who will do a top-notch job of it, and have that person report directly to you.
- As new administrators are hired, make sure they fully understand and are supportive of SBI.
- Orient new board members to the process, and keep them informed of its successes.
- Take time to savor the pleasure that comes from achieving something worthwhile.

PRESENTATION

AN OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL BASED IMPROVEMENT

Note: This presentation is intended as an example only. It can and should be modified to fit the audience, setting, and style of the presenter. Points to be covered are keyed to sections of the manual that explain them in greater detail. The presenter should be familiar with the manual's contents.

Introduction

In addition to the excerpt from David Kearns' article that appears at the beginning of this manual, the following quotes can be used to buttress the argument that the local school is where many decisions should be made. (Citations are in the *References* section.)

Thomas Jefferson in a letter to a friend, Joseph Cabell:
If 12 or 1,500 schools are to be placed under one general administration, an attention so divided will amount to a dereliction of them to themselves. It is surely better to place each school at once under the care of those most interested in its conduct.

Stewart Purkey and Susan Degan say there are thirteen characteristics of a good school and: "The first characteristic of a good school is school site managment." They go on to say, "A number of studies indicate that a school's administrators and staff need considerable freedom in determining exactly how to increase student performance. Because culture varies from school to school, administrators need the flexibility to tailor programs to the specific needs of the schools."

James Guthrie, in an article in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, says:
"The time is ripe to implement school-based managment." In fact, he says, "...without such a step, the education reform movement seems likely to lose its momentum."

In another *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Ralph W. Tyler says:
A call for reform can stimulate each local school to examine its effectiveness, to identify its problems, and to organize its teachers, principals, and parents, and others who are deeply interested in education to work together in developing and trying out possible solutions. ...Improvement in the educational effectiveness of a given school depends largely on the efforts of that school's personnel and parents. By starting to identify school problems and seek effective solutions, parents and school personnel can set in motion a significant 'reform movement' that can yield constructive outcomes.

Overhead #1: School Based Improvement

Key Points:

- School level decision making is called many things:
  - school based management
  - school site management
  - shared governance
  - school based improvement

- Regardless of what it is called, it means a decentralized, shared decision making process in which the local school becomes the place where most of the decisions about schooling take place.

- "School based improvement" is a more inclusive term that describes the process as one of improvement rather than management.

Overhead #2: What is SBI?

Key Points (see *What is School Based Improvement?*, page 13):

- Administrative decentralization – the establishment of intermediate regional or district offices. New York City is the classic example. This may be a necessary administrative move in those systems with special racial or ethnic considerations, those that are under court orders to provide special groupings or special services for certain schools, or where the district is too large to be manageable from a single central office.

- Administrative decentralization can also block communication with the individual schools and create more bureaucratic accountability for those schools.

- Political decentralization – the sharing of authority and power with local schools, without intermediate units to block the flow of information or decisions.

- Few willingly share or give up authority. But sharing of authority and power is essential for school based improvement to work.

Note: The Dade County list of areas for school level decision making could be described at this point.

(Overhead 2, continued)

• Shared decision making — authority shared with the principal is in turn shared with staff, parents, community, and students.

• Principals are also reluctant to give up power because they fear loss of control and central office retribution for failure. But if they are not willing to share authority, then the locus of power is only transferred from superintendent to principal and a new, school level, mini-bureaucracy is created.

Overhead #2: Each School Site

Key Points (see *Getting Started*, page 33):

• SBI should be the district's management process for all schools.

• SBI is usually begun with pilot schools unless the district is small.

• The selection of schools can be through volunteers, by central office choice or through an RFP process.

• The most important consideration in selection is the attitude of principals: they must be willing to share some of their authority.

• SBI is a *process* because there are no guaranteed or expected products. It is a way of managing a school, allowed to part from some of the onerous bureaucratic constraints that inhibit freedom and flexibility.

• SBI is a *trust process* because teachers must learn to trust administrators and parents, principals must learn not to fear central office retribution for mistakes and to trust their staffs to always behave in the best interest of children.

• The opposite of trust is fear, and fear blocks communications and creativity. SBI enables all the actors to learn how to work together in trust.

Overhead #4: Why SBI?

Key Points (see *Management Philosophy*, page 15):

- The greatest knowledge exists at the local school. Staff and parents know the needs of students, the uniqueness of the community, and the problems and joys of the families. The school is the logical place for decisions about how to educate each student.
- All parties are strengthened by the process. When people trust each other and work together, each becomes more powerful, not less.
- Similar models have been successful in business and industry.

Overhead #5: How Does it Work?

Key Points (see *Establishing School Site Councils*, page 39):

- The basic decision making unit at the school is the council/team/committee.
- The number of people serving can vary but must be large enough to be representative of all and small enough to function well.
- Councils must include teachers, parents/citizens, principal; should include students and support staff; might include other professional staff.
- There should be as many parent/community members as there are professionals on the council.
- Membership should be rotated. Two to three year, staggered terms maintain continuity while adding "new blood."

Overhead #6: Decision Making Guidelines

Key Points: (see *Decision Making Guidelines*, page 45):

- Need clear but not restrictive guidelines.
- Salt Lake City guidelines:
  - Are the decisions legal? They cannot violate federal, state, and municipal law and regulations.
  - Are the decisions in line with board policy? Mechanisms for negotiating exceptions to board policy and union contracts are required.
  - Are decisions within budget? Clarity about the amount of discretionary resources available is needed.
  - Are the decisions ethical? No council can make any decision that is harmful to any child or group of children, teacher or group of teachers, parent or group of parents, or any member of the administration.
- Principals can declare certain areas off-limits to council deliberation, but this should be kept to a minimum.

Overhead #7: What Can Councils Decide?

Key Points (see *Organizing Councils*, page 47):

- The first council activity is the development of a mission statement to serve as a guide for action. It is a dynamic, not a static, document that should be modified and altered as times and conditions change.
- The second task is to conduct a needs assessment and prepare a school profile. The needs assessment surveys parent and staff (and student) opinion of school strengths and weaknesses; the profile is a compilation of quantifiable data about students and programs, disaggregated to ensure that all groups of students are achieving the same, high goals.
- Councils must distinguish between management and educational improvement initiatives and address both or they are unlikely to make significant improvements in their schools.

(Overhead 5, continued)

• Educational improvment initiatives – activities related to instruction and use of staff, e.g. grading procedures, curriculum improvments, staff morale, special programs, selection of staff. These are generally longer term and more difficult to implement.

• Management initiatives – administrative issues, e.g. discipline, building security, report cards, lunchroom problems, developing parent handbooks. These typically are short term and relatively easy to implement.

Overhead #6: Decision Making Model—Board and Staff Roles

Key Points: (see *Establishing School Site Councils*, page 39):

• Larry Zenke, superintendent in Tulsa, Oklahoma has a model for looking at the roles of boards of education vis a vis their chief school administrators which can be applied to council/staff roles.

• Boards decide on policies and goals. Their superintendents act as advisors during this process.

• Superintendents decide on policy/goal implementation strategies while boards act as their advisors.

• Boards decide whether programs/activities have been successful or not and whether they should be continued or not. Their superintendents provide advice.

• When roles are confused, trauma results.

• Board/council and superintendent/staff roles are analogous except that principals and staff on councils are, at the same time, both policy makers and advisors and must learn not to dominate either process.

• Principals have great influence on councils and can easily dominate them. They must share their power or the SBI process will fail.

Overhead 9: What is Essential for SBI to Work

Key Points:

- Successful implementation and continuation depend on the support of many people – superintendent, board, central office staff, principals. (See *Hopping Hurdles*, page 25.)

- District Support Staff – the SBI manager who is responsible for communications among schools, with the central office and the board, and for training logistics.

- Councils need training in the theory of SBI, the characteristics of effective schools, the district's systems and procedures, and how to work together as a team. (See *Training Councils*, page 44.)

- Follow-up staff are needed to facilitate the work of the councils. (See *Selecting and Training Facilitators*, page 37.)

- A contract or memorandum of agreement needs to be drawn up between the SBI schools and the board of education. (See *Negotiating a Memorandum of Agreement*, page 50.)

Overhead 10: Conclusion

There is no panacea in American public education – no quick fixes. The school based improvement process, however, does provide for decisions to be made at the level where they have the greatest impact on the learning of students. It is a bottom up approach that involves those most concerned directly in the decisions that affect them and their children. For those reasons, above all the reforms that have recently been proposed, I believe it has the greatest chance for success.

OH1

School Based Improvement

✶ SBI ✶

What is SBI?

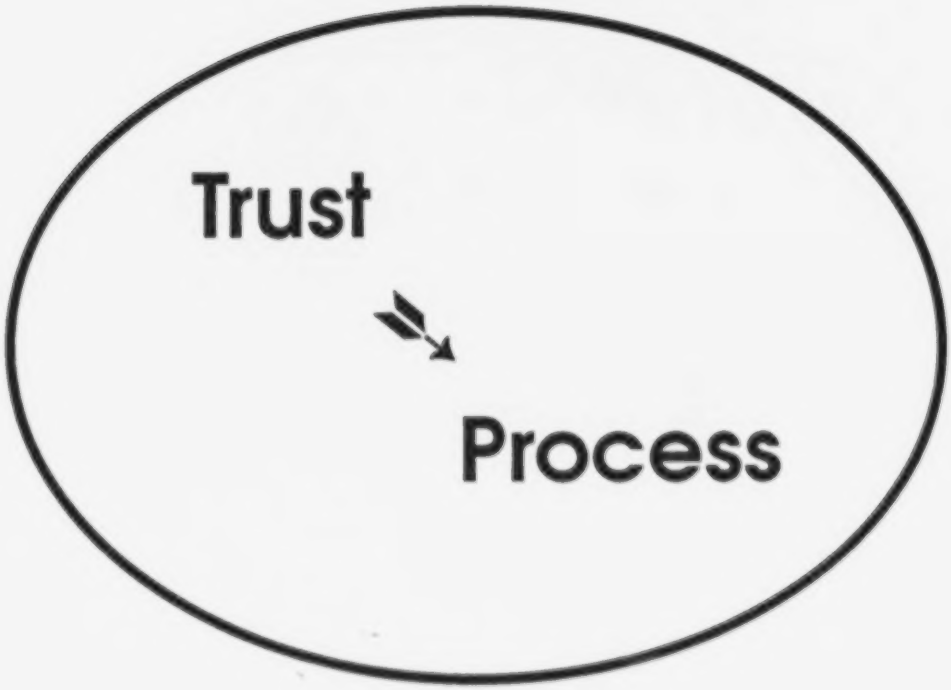
Decentralized Organization

- Administrative
- Political

Shared Decision Making

OH3

Each School Site



OH4

Why SBI?

Local School = Knowledge & Caring

Empowering Others Empowers Me

Quality Circles

How Does It Work?

7 - 15 Members

Teachers

Parents/Citizens

Students

Principal

Support Staff

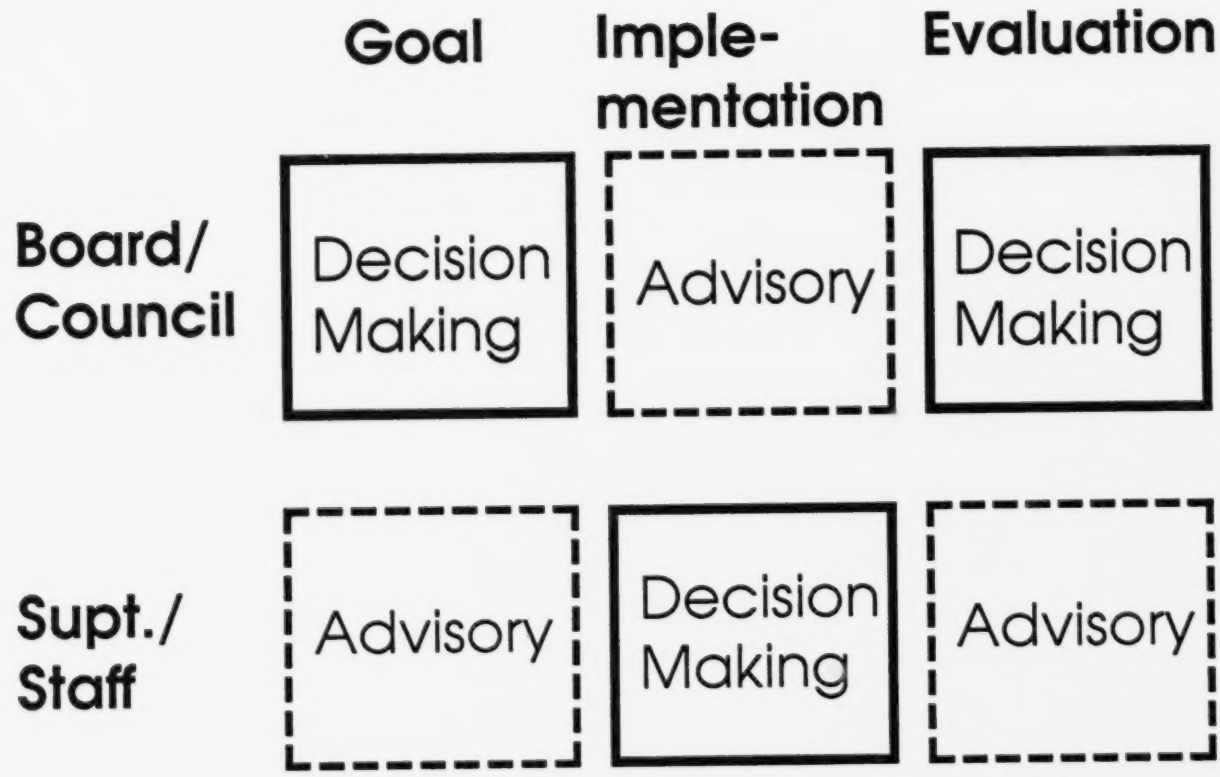
Decision Making Guidelines

- ✔ Legal
- ✔ Follows Board Policy
- ✔ Within Budget
- ✔ Ethical

OH7

What Can Councils Decide?

- Needs Assessment
- Educational Improvement Initiatives
- Management Initiatives
  - Safety
  - Lunchroom
  - Budget
  - Discipline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What is Essential for SBI to Work?

- Superintendent • Board
  Central Office Staff • Principals
- District Support Staff
- Training
- Follow-up Staff
- Memorandum of Agreement

When parents are involved:

Their children do better in school

and

Their children go to better schools.

Memorandum of Agreement

Following is a suggested format as modified from agreements developed in Allentown, PA; St. Louis, MO; and others.

LETTER OF AGREEMENT
SCHOOL BASED IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS

(date)

SECTION I

PURPOSE OF THE AGREEMENT

The purpose of this letter is to set forth the terms and conditions of the agreement between the _____ (hereinafter "the district") and the _____ (hereinafter "the school") to implement and operate School Based Improvement at the schools.

WHEREAS the district's priority is to provide the best education possible for all the students of the district and to recognize the role of all segments of the educational community as stockholders in the educational process, and

WHEREAS we believe the school site is the place where decisions, planning, and program implementation can result in increased accountability for improved education outcomes, and

WHEREAS we believe that School Based Improvement (hereinafter "SBI") is an appropriate way for facilitating the delivery of quality educational services.

NOW, therefore, the parties agree to the following:

SECTION II

DURATION OF THE AGREEMENT

The duration of this agreement is for a period beginning _____. The agreement will continue in force for additional years subject to an annual review by both parties. In the event proposals for modification of the agreement are made, the _____ School Council and the district must allow thirty (30) days for review by the other party. Then, if mutually agreeable, a modified letter will go into effect on September 1st of that year.

SECTION III

SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITMENT

The School Board is responsible for the policies and priorities of the district, and by their designation, the Superintendent and staff will:

1. Provide technical assistance and support to SBI Councils through consultants and central administrative staff.

2. Design appropriate agreements to facilitate activities designated as part of SBI while maintaining and adhering to articles of law, general policies and guidelines that govern the operations of schools, that are consistent with all current contracts, and that function within School Board regulations.

3. Provide timely access to information necessary for good school management in areas of personnel, budget, management information systems, and purchasing and accounting.

4. Support the timely processing of requests for funding and other resources which are germane to the operation of SBI schools.

5. Expressly share some decision making authority with the SBI councils in the areas of:

Curriculum

Special Education

Staffing

Budgeting

Books and Materials

Use of Facilities

Other

subject to the current conditions and restrictions contained in Board policy and regulations.

Should an SBI council find that certain Board policies do not allow the flexibility to provide programs or activities in the best interest of the students at that school, requests for modification of Board policy, exemptions, or waivers must be submitted in writing to the Board prior to initiation of the program or activity.

6. Provide planning time for the School Councils.

7. Make available to the SBI Councils, trained facilitators to provide liaison with the Superintendent and Central Office staff, to facilitate the work of the Councils, and to help Councils focus on issues that benefit students.

SECTION IV

SBI OFFICE COMMITMENT

The School Based Improvement Office will:

1. Provide workshops, institutes and other forms of education, training and support to individual SBI Councils throughout the school year according to the requests and needs of participating schools, within present system capabilities. Each School Council will be provided at least _____ days of training each year following the initial year of operation.

2. Document workshops on School Based Improvement, and make copies of the documents available to each SBI school. These documents will serve as a resource for future training.

3. Serve as a link with other schools within the district, the Central Office staff, and other school districts to provide regular information about activities of the schools.

4. Assess the outcome of SBI activities and determine, with input from SBI Councils, how appropriate activities may be expanded to additional schools.

SECTION V

SCHOOL COMMITMENT

This section of the Letter of Agreement pertains to all schools that are participating in School Based Improvement. Section VI (see paragraph 3 below) shall constitute the individual Letter of Agreement between each school and the district.

Each SBI school agrees to do the following:

1. Establish and maintain a School Based Improvement Council whose composition shall be a fair representation of the school and its community. Care shall be taken to ensure that a portion of the SBI Council membership will be constituted of non-Board of Education employees. The Council shall meet regularly throughout the year.

2. Adhere to rules, regulation, and policies of the Board of Education, and laws of local, state and federal governments, and demonstrate ethical practices in its operations.

3. Develop an individual Letter of Agreement which will specify objectives to be reached by the SBI process in that school, based upon information obtained from the following sources:
   a. Community needs assessment
   b. Staff needs assessment
   c. School profile
   d. Unique concerns as expressed by students, staff and community as they arise.

   Care will be taken to include educational objectives in the annual plan.

4. Identify and organize resources to support efforts to accomplish the objectives which are specified in the Letter of Agreement.

5. Provide open and ongoing communication with staff, community and central office staff regarding Council activities. Specifically, requests for information on the accomplishment of objectives will be fulfilled.

6. Develop a school instructional budget for the following school year that reflects district and, as much as possible, school-wide goals identified by the principal and SBI Council.

7. Work with the SBI and Central Office staffs to implement procedural changes that are deemed appropriate by both the staffs and the school.

8. Recommend curricular adaptations, modifications or supplements to enhance the educational service delivery to students. Such curricular recommendations may be implemented after approval in accordance with established procedures.

9. Develop a set of operational procedures for the School Council that are disseminated to faculty, parents and the SBI Office.

SECTION VI

Name SCHOOL

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

(date)

OBJECTIVES

Pursuant to paragraph 3 of Section V of this agreement, the following sections detail the school's objectives.

1. Management Initiatives:

2. Educational Initiatives:

3. Description of Unique Project(s):

SECTION VII

PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT

In consideration of the spirit and intent of this Letter of Agreement, the following signatures confirm their understanding of, and commitment to, the principles and objectives embodied herein:

SIGNATURES:

_____ Date: _____

School Council Chairperson

_____ Date: _____

Principal

_____ Date: _____

Superintendent of Schools

_____ Date: _____

School Board President

Needs Assessment

Included here are questions devised by school site councils in two schools from different parts of the country. They are meant to serve as examples for what other councils might do.

The following questions were developed by the Progressive Educational Partnership team at the Hanna Woods School, Parkway School District, Ballwin, Missouri, for a survey it conducted of families and staff of the school.

Respondents were asked to rate each of the following as:

- Excellent
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Need More Information

A. Teacher-pupil ratio
B. Support staff (Secretary, Instructional Aide, Custodian)
C. Health room services
D. Community School activities
E. Playground and playground equipment
F. Computer program
G. Library books and services
H. Access to teachers (Classroom, Music, Art, P.E.)
I. Access to principal
J. Access to counselor
K. Access to specialist (Reading, Gifted, Resource Teachers)

On the same questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate one of the following for each of the next set of items:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Need More Information

1. Students, teachers and parents in our school have good working relationships.
2. Consistent disciplinary practices are followed throughout the school.
3. Teachers in our school are interested in my child as an individual.
4. Efforts are made to make students aware we live in a culturally diversified world.
5. Our school facility is well maintained.
6. The curriculum is appropriate for today's students.
7. Children are adequately prepared in the basic skills for the next grade level.
8. Children are adequately prepared for the transition between primary (K-3) and intermediate (4-6) grade levels.
9. Academic problems are diagnosed early, communicated to the parents and dealt with promptly.
10. Teachers place the right amount of emphasis on developing critical thinking skills (problem solving and analyzing).
11. The school encourages parents to be actively involved in their child's education.
12. The concerns of parents are reflected in decisions made by our school.
13. Teachers discuss individual student's needs with parents.
14. A part-time nurse is adequate for our school.
15. I am aware of the proper channel for communicating concerns, needs, and questions to the school.
16. The hot lunch program offers an adequately prepared meal.
17. The school district's summer program satisfies the needs of the majority of students.
18. Safety is adequate on my child's bus and at the bus stop.
19. The district uses tax monies wisely to operate the school facilities.
20. Classroom teachers should be allowed to attend workshops and receive in-service training during regular school hours.
21. I would use a latch-key program if it were offered at the school.

The following questions were sent to parents along with their children's report cards by the School-based Improvement Committee of Raub Middle School in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Both Spanish and English versions were used.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed to each. Space was provided for comments after each section.

School Environment and Climate

1. Teachers hold high expectation for students.
2. The classroom atmosphere in this school is conducive to learning.
3. Teachers treat students with respect in this school.
4. People in this school solve problems rather than just talk about them.
5. This school utilizes the talents and skills of its teachers effectively.
6. Students, teachers, administrators, and parents understand that all students are expected to master the basic skills.
7. There is a set of skills that all students are expected to master at each grade level for the major subjects.
8. Teachers are confident that all children can learn.
9. Teachers speak well of each other and their students.
10. The school is a safe, secure place to work and study.
11. Teachers and students have a sense of pride in their school.
12. Teachers are good models of behavior and academic commitment.

Discipline

1. Students are held responsible for the consequences of their behavior.
2. Administrators provide sufficient support on disciplinary matters.
3. Parents provide sufficient support to teachers on disciplinary matters.
4. Students treat teachers with respect.
5. Parents communicate with the school on disciplinary matters.
6. Discipline procedures are handled effectively in this school.

Building Leadership

1. Teachers and students respect the principal.
2. Teachers and students respect the assistant principal.
3. The principal conveys to the community a positive view of the school and its program, staff, and students.
4. A positive feeling permeates the school.
5. The parents feel this school is run in an orderly manner without being restrictive.
6. The principal holds high expectations for all teachers and students.
7. The principal is accessible and responsive
   a. to teachers
   b. to students
   c. to parents.
8. The principal has a strong, positive vision of the school and communicates it well to all audiences.

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